

# Lawler's Story: How It Unfolded

*Matwatch*  
**'93**

Steve

*Beverly*

In previous years of the original *Matwatch*, we tried to bring you a moment away from the tensions, the intensity and the zealousness which often accompany wrestling and its analysts.

In particular, the closing months of 1993 brought stories which titillate, shock and attract your attention; however, anyone with a heart would trade them for more of the peace this season is meant to reflect.

Regardless of the increasing twist toward political correctness in pro wrestling, as well as the rest of society, I will not apologize for, nor drift from a wish that the spirit of the Christ in Christmas, which is all but omitted in many of the mainline public declarations of the observance, will be a part of these coming weeks for you and your family.

I love this time of the year more than any other. I always will. When I remember the quiet reading of the second chapter of the Book of Luke by my father, the enveloping hug from my maternal grandmother on our arrival after Christmas, or glorious choirs singing "Night of Miracles" or "Dawn of Redeeming Grace," I am led to reflect on joyous, effervescent moments which are all too fleeting and precious.

When I reread Luke 2, I am rekindled in the humility of the story because humility is a medicine we all need in massive doses every day. In the fantasy world of pro wrestling, which is only non-fantasy behind-the-scenes (though at times a bit surrealistic), humility is an all-too-lacking commodity among the executives, the performers, us journalists and our readership.

As I have said in years past, there's an awful lot more to life than wrestling: your families, your health, your friends and... hopefully, a bit of religion. Take this wish for more of all of these into your new year.

*Steve Beverly*

**A**t deadline, Jerry Lawler was awaiting a pre-trial hearing in Louisville, Ky., which would either exonerate him of two months of regionally-headlined accusations of statutory rape and sodomy of a Louisville-area teenager, or lead to trial.

The following chronology retraces how this story was uncovered in Louisville and the dilemma journalists, both mainline and in the wrestling media, face in weighing reporting inflammatory accusations and the potential reputation damage against a public figure, even after exoneration.

## LAST WEEK IN OCTOBER

Most major stories begin with the simplicity of a telephone call. That's what happened in the newsroom of Louisville CBS affiliate WLKY-TV. The station, perennially second in the ratings in the market, received a call from members of the family of the teenager who originally filed accusations against Lawler. The caller outlined the charges. Reporter John Boel, who broke the first story, did not merely go on the caller's word. Boel, who has excellent police sources---particularly inside the Louisville Police Department's Crimes Against Children unit---spent several days checking out the report. Were the charges actually being filed? Had officers investigated? To what degree did evidence exist to back up the charges? Because of the involvement of juveniles, Boel and nightbeat reporter Mark Grimm conducted at least two interviews with family members in silhouette with voice distortion to protect their identities. Still, WLKY would sit on the story until the case would go to a grand jury, lest the accusations not go forward.

## WEEK OF NOV. 8-12

The wrestling rumor mill began to subtly buzz with stories of former USWA personalities being subpoenaed to testify before the Jefferson County grand jury in Louisville. At least one of those personalities has a reputation for being a less-than-credible "insider" source. Nonetheless, the source was one of seventeen reportedly subpoenaed in the case.

Reporters Boel and Grimm were sitting pretty. Neither of the other network affiliates in Louisville were even aware of the case building against Lawler. The 44-year-old veteran is not regarded with the celebrity status in the Kentucky city as in his native Memphis and his World Wrestling Federation status had not achieved a natural association there.

WLKY was the only station in town to carry the story on its 6:00 news the evening of Nov. 12. Ironically, at midday, Boel attempted to contact WMC-TV in Memphis, where Lawler's

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Saturday USWA program airs, for footage. WMC refused the request, citing a standard contractual difficulty in sharing news tape on a cross-network affiliate basis. Ironically, WMC---being shared full details on the indictment---neither accepted information on the story from WLKY, nor did it pursue the story with any vigor. Later in the same evening, WMC sports director Jarvis Greer said: "We're treating it as if it were a rumor. We don't have any information on it. We've been told not to air any story until we can get it directly from the courts in Louisville and they're closed until Monday. We've got our 'wrestling guy' (presumably Dave Brown, WMC's weather anchor) checking on it but he has nothing." In theory, Greer was right in waiting on court confirmation; however, the first contact Boel made with WMC was shortly after noon. Had WMC followed what most professional news organizations would do, a reporter could have contacted the Jefferson County court well before its 5:00 p.m. closing. However, to be fully aware of a report in the nation's 47th market of perhaps the most recognized person in Memphis being indicted on sex charges and not broadcasting the information by quoting WLKY was incomprehensible. A party familiar with WMC, which is in the midst of turmoil from its recent sale by Scripps-Howard Broadcasting to Atlanta broadcaster Bert Ellis, told *Matwatch '93* the station had no intention of actively pursuing the story: "Lawler's made them too much money on Saturday mornings through the years and he's considered part of the family. If anything, they'll report it but it will be from Lawler's perspective."

## McMahon: New York Watches, Few Others

The national media---in the form of ESPN (*Sportscenter*) and NBC News---on Tom Brokaw's nightly report---were the first to tell the nation of mid-November indictments against World Wrestling Federation owner Vince McMahon and his Titan Sports.

However, outside the New York media, the story has had little sizzle to the degree many analysts anticipated. Dr. Steve Padgett, a professor of journalism at Troy State University who has followed wrestling, was not surprised. "Had this indictment clearly spelled out a name of the level of Hulk Hogan, or had it occurred in 1988 when McMahon first made his way onto prime time on NBC," said Padgett, "you would have seen a larger media blanket."

However, Padgett says the national and big-city media look on wrestling with such a jaundiced eye, the impact of the story was diluted. "The national media has a specific agenda," said Padgett. "The only reason they focus on a story like McMahon's at all is because most editors look on wrestling as the sports equivalent to a carnival and when trouble brews, it's virtually expected."

Plus, as Padgett interprets, steroids still do not draw a major portion of the media's attention. "The (former Florida champion) Ed Gantner (who died of steroid abuse) story never gained major media momentum in Florida because the legislature had its obligatory political hearings and forgot it," said Padgett.

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Interestingly, market leader WHAS and NBC affiliate WAVE had nothing on the story, though the WHAS night assignment editor told *Matwatch '93* he had monitored the WLKY report and "may follow up on it." A city editor at *The Louisville Courier-Journal* claimed to have nothing on the story in her computer. Yet, the next morning the Louisville paper would prominently feature the story---though no report in Louisville would tie Lawler to the World Wrestling Federation.

Not one Memphis station would air the story on Friday night. Lawler's short statement to Boel outside the courtroom: "The King is fighting back. The King is not going to take this lying down. I'll prove this is all a lie." Lawler left the impression he would address the subject the next day on the Memphis TV show and also mentioned an alleged taped telephone conversation with one of the teenage girls who testified---a conversation Lawler insisted would exonerate him.

An evening phone call to some WWF sources indicated the company was well aware of the situation and would likely take action, to be announced on Jim Ross's *Radio WWF* show the next evening. The clear implication was Lawler was dead meat with Titan Sports until Lawler was acquitted. Vince McMahon, the sources said, could not afford to be seen on the air seated next to an accused sex offender when a possible federal indictment against McMahon was only days away. This was one time not even a reshuffling of the *Survivor Series*, which largely hinged on Lawler's heat, could be avoided. Would Lawler be reinstated if found not guilty? "Sure," one source said. "He's been a professional through and through ever since he's come up here. I wouldn't see any reason why not."

## SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13

The story indeed broke in the Louisville, Nashville and Memphis newspapers this morning. However, the largest headlines and showcasing came in *The Jackson Sun*, the paper serving the largest metro area between Memphis and Nashville and most of the rural areas where Lawler runs spot USWA shows. Except for Memphis, the stories followed an Associated Press account. The Jackson newspaper displayed the story just below its nameplate on page one in large headlines.

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In the meantime, Lawler and his attorney were in dispute. The lawyer wanted Lawler to maintain a low profile. The 44-year-old veteran, however, was determined to launch a high-profile campaign to engineer sympathy and support from long-time fans and viewers. Lawler won. The attorney was fired.

Lawler went on *USWA Championship Wrestling* and pulled out all the stops. Ironically, he had not been on or mentioned on the USWA show the previous two weeks, fueling speculation his WWF appearances would become more permanent. Arriving with his son Brian Christopher to promote the Monday night Mid-South Coliseum card, Lawler quelled the crowd: "I want to talk about something real serious. In the next few days, you're going to be hearing some things about me. Some things that won't be too pleasant. But I want to tell you this: I've been living and wrestling here for 23 years. My family lives here. You know me and you know I wouldn't lie to you. These charges are absolutely not true....and I'll prove it, if I have to go to court to do it." The studio crowd uproariously cheered.

## McMahon, Media

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"Even the hearings themselves received only token mention in the Florida media because Gantner was a big name," said Padgett, "and too many editors don't consider anything related to wrestling a news story."

All three local stations in New York City offered extensive reports on the McMahon indictments in their late evening newscasts. WABC reporter Jim Dolan appeared live outside the Flint, Mich., arena where the WWF was on tour the evening of Nov. 18. One fan Dolan interviewed, Ray Cooper, said: "It doesn't matter to me. Vince McMahon's been great for wrestling. So what if he's used steroids. Leave him alone."

At the network level, CBS and ABC aired their local New York reporters' stories on their overnight newscasts. ABC's most visible tie-in was as a tag to an 18-minute package on steroid abuse by high school athletes. Sam Donaldson reported the McMahon indictment in his anchor wrapup.

In syndication, *Inside Edition* checked in with a repeat of a two-year-old report on the steroid conviction of Dr. George Zahorian deceptively sandwiched between Bill O'Reilly's fresh lead-in and lead-out concerning McMahon's woes. A *Current Affair* and *Hard Copy* are both reportedly working on stories related to the case but as of deadline, neither had aired.

The most frustrated crew was from the NBC *Now with Tom Brokaw and Katie Couric* newsmagazine. After having investigated the charges against McMahon and Titan more than a year, the *Now* piece was killed because of the series' policy to focus on stories which occur in the week of broadcast. McMahon's charges came just before a scheduled Thanksgiving Eve pre-emption of *Now*.

Later in the day, the story finally appeared on the 5 p.m. newscasts for WMC and WREG-TV, the CBS affiliate in Memphis. However, WREG prominently played the story in its first segment. WMC delayed its report until its second half-hour at 5:33 p.m. During the story, Lawler related much of what he later said in a self-initiated phone call to a mat newsletter: "This whole thing started as some exaggerated girl talk. One girl bragging to her friends about some sexual conquests. One thing led to another and, eventually, my name was brought into it. That led to someone calling the police, which led to the investigation, which led to the indictments."

**"I've been living and wrestling here for 23 years. My family lives here. You know me and you know I wouldn't lie to you. These charges are absolutely not true."**

--- Jerry Lawler

## SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Lawler was to face an arraignment in Louisville two days later. However, after perhaps his biggest Mid-South Coliseum ovation the previous Monday since his AWA world title win over Curt Hennig in 1988, Lawler was convinced a public relations offensive was the right strategy. On the Saturday morning TV show, he would tell viewers of hiring a new attorney.

"His name is William Massey, a very well-respected Memphis attorney," Lawler said. "He's been working very hard on the case this week and he tells me some things are developing which will probably lead to this whole thing being over very, very shortly. At least, I hope so." Lawler was still not detailing the alleged recorded phone conversation he alleged to Louisville reporters.

Of note, *USWA Championship Wrestling* emcee Dave Brown was seen on-camera openly nodding agreement with and showing encouragement for Lawler, an incongruous note of advocacy for someone who is a member of WMC-TV News' anchor team.

Jim Ross began his *Radio WWF* show that night by referring to Lawler's "legal problems" and announcing his replacement in the *Survivor Series* by Shawn Michaels and on *Superstars of Wrestling* the next weekend by Rio Rogers (Bruce Prichard).

## SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21

The day before Lawler's arraignment was highlighted by a page one story in *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, obviously

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planted by Massey. The lawyer proclaimed a visit he paid to Louisville "at the request of (Lawler's original accuser) and her mother," had resulted in the 13-year-old recanting her story. Massey chalked up the girl's testimony to pressure from a boyfriend and predicted the charges would be dropped the next day.

The Jackson and Nashville papers bannered the Massey predictions on page one the next morning; however, the Associated Press carried the story to radio and television outlets across Tennessee and Kentucky for Sunday newscasts. Still, no connection was made in any of the stories between Lawler and the WWF.

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22

While the rest of the country was remembering (or wearing thin of reminiscences of) where it was when John F. Kennedy was killed 30 years earlier, Jerry Lawler was in a courtroom. An early morning call to the assignment desk of WLKY alerted the station to Massey's forecast of victory. Assignment editor Lou Brown relayed the message to his crew.

Meanwhile, reporter Grimm bristled at reports from other publications of portions of his initial story being erroneous. In the initial Nov. 12 report, Grimm detailed how Lawler was being investigated not only in Louisville but in Sellersburg, Ind., just across the Kentucky state line. Grimm quoted one of two teenage girls depicted as witnesses as saying of one encounter, "We walked into the room and he (Lawler) said, 'Let's get naked.' We got onto the bed and had sex while we watched cartoons. When we left, he took us to Taco Bell and Value City." Grimm told *Matwatch '93*: "Our information came directly from testimony provided by the district attorney's office or from our interviews with family members. To say our report is erroneous is either a crock or someone changed her story."

Lawler walked into the Jefferson County courtroom wearing a collarless athletic shirt and pleaded innocent to all five counts. This time, all three Louisville network affiliates were present and shared footage with their Memphis counterparts.

However, contrary to Massey's predictions, the charges were not dropped and a pre-trial hearing was set for Jan. 7, which led to some media speculation Lawler and his lawyer had been grandstanding. A discovery meeting for the two legal parties to exchange evidence would be held Dec. 6.

That evening, the Lawler arraignment was the top story on the 6 p.m. edition of *News Channel 3* on WREG. In addition to the courtroom footage, Lawler was met at the Memphis airport, telling a different

**"Our information came directly from testimony provided by the district attorney's office and from our interviews with the family members. To say our reports were erroneous is either a crock, or someone changed her story."**

---Mark Grimm  
WLKY-TV

story: "This wasn't a day to drop charges. That'll come later. The papers got it all wrong." Massey would concur, predicting the indictments would be withdrawn after the Dec. 6 attorneys' meeting. The lawyer said he had a four-page signed statement from the accuser recanting her story.

## TUES., NOV. 23

Reporter Grimm called to say Indiana authorities planned to drop their investigation. "They say they're now not getting cooperation

from their key witness and without that witness, they say they don't have a case." Grimm said his station interviewed another member of the accusing family who told WLKY he knew the girl was going to change her story and had been under pressure to do so. However, the station was delaying the interview because of legal considerations, since the family member was a juvenile. The Louisville reporter said the girl's family could "best be described as not well-to-do, lower middle class. They're a strange group."

Yet, a member of the Crimes Against Children unit in Louisville, who requested anonymity, told *Matwatch '93* of being perplexed at the case's turn of events. "This unit has had an 85 per cent success rate in clearing cases since its formation," the investigator said. "We don't pursue cases until we go through an extensive amount of diagnostic information. This isn't the first time a witness has attempted to change a story---but we've never had one to testify under oath to a grand jury, then change the story."

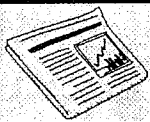
The gist: the district attorney's office could attempt to threaten the girl with a perjury charge if she holds to her revised account.

## SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27

Lawler turned on the p.r. steam on television. Amid reports new WMC-TV owner Bert Ellis was weighing canceling the USWA Saturday morning outings, Lawler began fashioning a "what-a-great-guy-I-am" campaign. His friend, Memphis rock band-leader Tom Nunnery appeared on the show to proclaim his support for Lawler.

Then, a five-minute montage of Lawler and Nunnery singing Christmas carols to underprivileged Memphis children was shown, followed by a seven-minute video of Lawler interacting with children during the holidays through the years. While lacking the big-time professional polish of a WWF video, the pieces nonetheless were reminiscent of Vince McMahon's self-aggrandizement earlier in the year

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## HEADLINES

# Heenan Signs With WCW

ATLANTA----Just two weeks after his unceremonious departure from the World Wrestling Federation, Bobby Heenan has signed a contract to join the announce team of World Championship Wrestling.

The contract was confirmed by The Real Wrestling Hotline Dec. 19. While details of the deal have not been released, Heenan is expected to join both the Saturday and Sunday night TBS/WCW shows and could be slotted on the syndicated *World Wide Wrestling* after the current cycle of Disney-MGM tapes ends in February.

Heenan is not expected to take a permanent announce role on TBS until Jan. 29. He left the WWF after failure to reach agreement on contract terms.

## Ventura, WCW: Deal Far Apart

ATLANTA----Inside sources say current negotiations between Jesse Ventura and World Championship Wrestling are "very far apart."

Ventura, who was signed to a two-year deal by former WCW operations chief Kip Frey in 1992 at a reported \$350,000-a-year, is reportedly being asked to accept a lesser salary for a renewal.

TBS owner Ted Turner told his staff Dec. 16 he hoped Ventura could be re-signed.

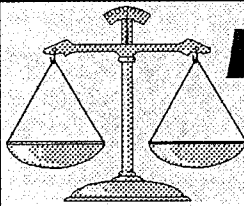
## Ted Visits His Mat Troops

ATLANTA----In an unprecedented visit with his entire WCW executives and staff, TBS owner Ted Turner pledged "strong financial support" for the company in a speech to the group Dec. 16.

Turner reportedly told his wrestlers 1994 "will be the year" WCW overtakes the WWF in fan and viewer acceptance.

During the visit, sources say Turner related hopes for a one-time WCW special on the company's Turner Network Television (TNT) during 1994, as part of that network's emphasis on special events.

Reportedly, TNT executives were unaware of any such plans.



## MATWATCH '93 EDITORIALS

### LET CASES RUN THEIR COURSES

The recent indictments of Vince McMahon and Jerry Lawler---one long-anticipated and the other a shocker---are anything but good for pro wrestling, despite what critics of either believe.

When the acknowledged leader and---as WABC-TV's Jim Dolan calls "the most powerful man in wrestling"---faces the possible end of his empire, the repercussions potentially damage the entirety of the industry. The bulk of U.S. mat fans (particularly those with only casual familiarity) equate the name WWF exclusively as wrestling. If McMahon eventually settles the case or is convicted, the domino effect potentially costs wrestling (including WCW) its base of national advertising support (already shrinking) and syndicated television lineup. Nothing will make advertisers run faster than association with tainted goods; likewise, television executives who may be in your corner today can drop you faster than a rabbit.

With Lawler's case, the future of one of the few remaining regional promotions of teetering substance hangs in the balance. At the moment, Lawler is retaining vocal support from his studio and arena fans. But the current case has already cost him his most impressive national run with the WWF and certainly is not helping negotiations with new WMC-TV owner Bert Ellis in retaining the only remaining live weekly TV mat show in America.

The temptation for many writers, particularly in McMahon's case, and competitors to sound the death knell for both. Some---particularly former employees of McMahon's with axes to grind---are waiting with chops licking for the ultimate legal shoe to drop.

*Matwatch '93* strongly calls for patience and diplomacy in the matters of both men. Let the legal system take its course. Regardless of personal feelings about either---and more negative emotion within the industry exists toward McMahon---each is entitled to his day in court. The media and wrestlers should remember: McMahon and Lawler have each been indicted and arraigned---not tried and convicted.

### ON THE OTHER HAND....

Until the legal issues are cleared, both McMahon and Lawler are in an ambiguous situation remaining on the air on their respective groups' television shows. And a third personality has placed himself in a sad but undeniable situation.

McMahon started this entire steamroller by dumping Lawler---and justifiably so, in our view---from his WWF analyst role after Lawler's Louisville indictment. However, for Vince to continue to foist himself on viewers---as talented as the man is---after his own indictment is the worst example of a double standard and no defense is acceptable. McMahon should step aside and allow Jim Ross to host his major shows until the legal case is cleared.

Lawler, on the other hand, has attempted to use his Memphis television show to campaign for public support in the wake of his indictment. As booker, he has further re-inserted the tired, tasteless abuse of women angles on the Saturday series while he is still under indictment for alleged sex abuse of a minor. Clearly, Lawler is crossing a line of taste and should stay off his own air and concentrate on his defense until his legal affairs are over.

Finally, the Lawler case is creating a seemingly innocent, yet embarrassing situation for a man who has been free of controversy. While the idea of a member of a news anchor team hosting a wrestling show has always been borderline, Dave Brown has managed to avoid criticism in Memphis. Yet, his open nods of agreement and support of Lawler on the USWA show place him at odds with the role of a news employee, even if Dave's role is as weathercaster. Brown should not be an advocate for or against Lawler. Accordingly, *Matwatch '93* feels Brown should step away from the USWA show and concentrate on the role from which he makes the bulk of his living---television news.



# THE RATINGS PAGE

## CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

| Nov. Averages    | Rating/Share | Total Homes   | Oct. Avg. |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------|
| Monday Night Raw | 2.9/4.2      | 1.768 million | 2.9/4.1   |
| WCW Sat. Night   | 2.7/5.3      | 1.649 million | 2.2/4.5   |
| WCW Main Event   | 2.1/3.4      | 1.247 million | 1.5/3.0   |
| WWF All-American | 1.9/5.1      | 1.176 million | 2.0/5.6   |
| WCW Power Hour   | 1.6/6.4      | 987,000       | 1.4/5.8   |
| WWF Mania        | 1.4/4.3      | 889,000       | 1.3/4.0   |

| Week Ending Nov. 8 | Rating/Share | Total Homes   | N. Rank |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Monday Night Raw   | 3.0/4.4      | 1.844 million | 11      |
| WCW Sat. Night     | 2.3/4.7      | 1.415 million | 32      |
| WCW Main Event     | 2.0/3.6      | 1.230 million |         |
| WWF All-American   | 1.9/5.4      | 1.180 million |         |
| WCW Power Hour     | 1.4/6.0      | 847,000       |         |
| WWF Mania          | 1.1/2.6      | 683,000       |         |

### Week Ending Nov. 15

|                    |         |               |     |
|--------------------|---------|---------------|-----|
| Monday Night Raw   | 3.1/4.5 | 1.901 million | 7   |
| WCW Saturday Night | 3.1/6.0 | 1.873 million | 8   |
| WWF All-American   | 2.0/5.2 | 1.242 million | T40 |
| WCW Main Event     | 1.9/3.6 | 1.169 million |     |
| WCW Power Hour     | 1.8/7.0 | 1.107 million |     |
| WWF Mania          | 1.4/4.3 | 870,000       |     |

### Week Ending Nov. 22

|                    |         |               |    |
|--------------------|---------|---------------|----|
| WCW Saturday Night | 2.6/5.1 | 1.6 million   | 28 |
| WCW Main Event     | 2.3/3.9 | 1.415 million | 37 |
| Monday Night Raw   | 2.2/3.1 | 1.367 million | 39 |
| WWF All-American   | 1.8/4.7 | 1.118 million |    |
| WCW Power Hour     | 1.7/6.3 | 1.046 million |    |
| WWF Mania          | 1.6/4.9 | 996,000       |    |

### Week Ending Nov. 29

|                  |         |               |    |
|------------------|---------|---------------|----|
| Monday Night Raw | 3.1/4.3 | 1.936 million | 13 |
| WCW Sat. Night   | 2.9/5.4 | 1.784 million | 23 |
| WCW Main Event   | 1.9/3.5 | 1.171 million |    |
| WWF All-American | 1.8/5.0 | 1.119 million |    |
| WWF Mania        | 1.6/5.4 | 995,000       |    |
| WCW Power Hour   | 1.5/6.4 | 925,000       |    |

### November Specials

|                              |         |               |     |
|------------------------------|---------|---------------|-----|
| Clash of the Champions (TBS) | 3.3/5.0 | 1.996 million | 7   |
| Surv. Series Showdown (USA)  | 2.9/4.2 | 1.804 million | T23 |

**THE REAL  
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## WHAT THEY MEAN

The month of November showed promise for virtually every show, except *All-American Wrestling*. With the exception of one week each, *Monday Night Raw* and *WCW Saturday Night* have consistently stood tall in the face of strong college and pro football competition. *Raw* scored a 3 or better three Mondays and only faltered the week of its truncated repeat of *Survivor Series Showdown* from the night before, which increasingly is proving to be a weaker strategy for Titan Sports pay-per-view previews.

*WCW Main Event* also posted a surprisingly strong 40 per cent increase to a 2.1, a full four-tenths above its fourth quarter average of last year. The Sunday TBS show jumped despite a week Steve Regal-Todd Champion best-of-three series headlining the month. *All-American* posted its second straight slight decline, though not a disastrous drop opposite NFL pre-game shows and games (on the west coast).

Both morning shows picked up interest with the pre-Thanksgiving week almost resulting in every show topping a million homes. *Mania* posted its high-water rating ever for the Nov. 20 episode and tied it the following week.

However, the distance between the flagship shows for the big two groups continues to be indicative viewers are voting to concentrate on a single show per week for each company.

## THE SPECIALS

Despite not registering numbers of its glory years, *Clash of the Champions* left TBS executives pleased with its 3.3/5.0. Ironically, for the second straight show, the Sting bout (teamed with Davey Boy Smith against the Nasty Boys) topped the Ric Flair main event, 3.8 to 3.6. However, the 3.3 overall mark topped the 3.2/4.8 of the November 1992 *Clash*.

*Survivor Series Showdown* pulled respectable numbers opposite strong network competition and a Steelers-Oilers NFL game on ESPN which topped the week with a 9.2. Nonetheless, the 5.1 for the Sunday-Monday (*Raw* edited repeat) combo was the lowest two-parter ever for a WWF pay-cable preview on USA.

## FINAL NOTES

Early December saw *Raw* post its third-highest rating ever---a 3.3---with a weak Savage-Fatu topline. The Dec. 6 show led with a 2.9, indicating the McMahon/Titan woes are yet to hurt the audience. *Saturday Night* posted 2.6 and 2.5 in the runner-up slot. Of note: the Dec. 5 *All-American* scored its top numbers in six months with a 2.5/6.3....The Global syndie show is fed via satellite Wednesday mornings at 11:15 a.m. (ET) on Telstar 302, Channel 7.... Keep a watch on the advertiser lineup for WWF shows in the weeks to come, including the "promotional consideration" companies.

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**THEY  
SAID IT!!!**

*The Best of November*

1. Jim Cornette, *Monday Night Raw*: "Get well, Dr. Kevorkian. He's never been sued for malpractice. How could you tell when he screws up? When his patients come back to life?" 2. Cornette, *MNR*, on Kevorkian: "He ought to be Lex Luger's personal physician. He's already done wonders for his personality." 3. Cornette, *MNR*: "Tatanka's just like Lorena Bobbitt. He wants revenge at any cost." 4. Jesse Ventura, *WCW Sat. Night*, on Charlotte getting *Starrcade*: "It doesn't take much to get rednecks on fire." 5. Ventura, *SN*: "Mark Starr has as much chance of winning the TV title as the Atlanta Braves do of winning the World Series." 6. Bobby Heenan, *MNR*, on USA's *Planet of the Apes* nights: "Starring Gorilla Monsoon---frontal nudity not accepted." 7. Jim Ross/Heenan, *WWF Challenge*: (JR) "We've gotta go to Oklahoma some time." (BH) "You mean Alcatraz? Maybe we could look at some magazines, like *Flea Market Females* or *Waffle House Women*." 8. Ventura, *SN*: "Tony, if it wasn't for your mother-in-law, you'd have had Domino's Pizza for Thanksgiving." 9. Brian Christopher, *USWA*, to Toni Adams: "You've been dumped more times than a Dempsey dumpster. You've had more hands on you than a doorknob." 10. Larry Zbyszko, *WCW Main Event*, "The greatest thing that ever happened to the University of Louisville: Erik Watts graduated." 11. Zbyszko/Chris Cruise, *WME*: (CC) "This is America." (LZ) "Yeah, we only bow when Hillary comes out." 12. Cornette, *MNR*, on I.R.S.: "He keeps a low profile. He goes in and out of the country through Billings, Montana." 13. Cornette, *MNR*: "Jack Tunney---the most respected president since Grover Cleveland." 14. Cornette, *MNR*: "The Smoking Gunns need some molding. They look like a couple of globs of Play-Doh." 15. Heenan, *MNR*, on Headshrinkers: "They're the original 3 Musketeers." 16. Cornette, *MNR*, on Harts: "They're a dysfunctional family. Destination: Oprah Winfrey." 17. Chris Candido, *Smoky Mountain*: "These idiots only make enough money to sit in the back row at a WCW show." 18. Gene Okerlund, *SN*: "Do you know a good barber in town?"

### *Strongest Comments*

1. Ventura, *SN*: "Who's really more important to TBS: the Braves or me? I am!" 2. Terry Funk, *The Real Wrestling Hotline*: "The entire wrestling business needs to clean itself up from the inside---and I mean the wrestlers!"

### *Epilog*

## My Life on The WCW Hotline



Sharon Sidello is only a familiar name if one reads wrestling newsletters. For three years, she was the chief marketer of wrestling pay-per-view for Turner Home Entertainment.

However, with the purge of the Bill Watts regime from World Championship Wrestling, Sidello moved to a slot of increasing influence in the WCW hierarchy. Among her responsibilities: the WCW Hotline.

When Sidello called me on a Monday night in March to say she wanted to be my "point person" to "be sure we're putting the right things on the hotline," I flat out asked: "Sharon, are you saying you want to begin to muzzle and censor me, because if you do, let's call a halt right now---no hard feelings." "Oh, no," she responded. "But we just want to be sure we coordinate and don't put irresponsible material on the line." "Fine," I said. "Then, you don't have to worry about me."

I never heard from Sharon Sidello again. But I heard plenty about her. The marketing of the WCW Hotline deteriorated to the point that after Jim Ross's departure, I---the lowly non-WCW employee---was drawing the most calls. Even Missy Hyatt was hot at Sidello because her contract called for her to receive a percentage of her Sunday night revenue.

Yet, I would hear seven times in those 16 weeks of how Sidello was going to fire me. What boiled the tensions was when I was critical of Tony Schiavone's fawning all over Steve Austin and Brian Pillman's world tag team title victory and failing to challenge them on the air about bashing Ricky Steamboat with a title belt to win. "What kind of message does this send to young people when the announcer acts as if it never happened when he clearly saw it?" I asked.

In late May, Lance Russell---still consulting with the WCW line---was in the Atlanta office to resign to join the new Real Wrestling Hotline. Sidello, unaware, told Lance: "We're going to HAVE to do something about Steve Beverly. What he has been putting on our hotline is totally unacceptable!" Lance, who rarely boils, shot back: "Well, I totally disagree and, furthermore, you won't have to be bothered with him any longer. Because he's resigning this week to go with The Real Wrestling Hotline!" Lance apologized later for jumping the gun in telling Sharon. I laughed and told him I only wish I'd been there to see it. I wrote a resignation letter the next Tuesday. Sidello never responded. As many times as I was "fired" from the WCW Hotline, I had the pleasure of quitting.

I moved to the independent TRWH where my editorial freedom is never questioned and though we struggle for acceptance, the experience has been a pleasure. As for Sidello, she went on to produce a violent minimovie-for-mat TV. She is now consigned to marketing European sales for WCW.

**THE REAL WRESTLING HOTLINE**

**1-900-903-9030**

**OPTION 1**

**Meltzer (M-W-F) Beverly (Tu-Sat) Hudson (Th) Madden (Su)**

**OPTION 2**

**Makropoulos (Su) Mooneyham (M) Hudson (Tu) Blackstone (W) Clark (Th)  
Russell (F) Pedicino (Sat)**

## **Lawler's Story**

(Continued from Page 4)

on the USA Network in the midst of the federal investigation into Titan Sports. Clearly, the intended message was asking: how could a guy as warm and wonderful toward children as Jerry Lawler be maliciously and falsely accused of sexually abusing teenage girls? The studio crowd played right into it. Brown continued to nod his support.

### **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4**

Lawler was publicly hoping the end of his ordeal was only two days away. However, he privately knew the "discovery meeting" Monday in Louisville would only serve as a preliminary to the January pre-trial hearing.

This Saturday's USWA show would continue the saga of Jerry Lawler: Great Humanitarian. Lawler would show a six-minute sequence of his visit the day before to the Veterans' Administration Hospital in Memphis, with Lawler giving the infirmed vets a chance to wish Christmas greetings and---as a sidebar---say how much they liked Jerry Lawler. Said Lawler: "When I think about what these men have been through, I stop and realize that the problems I've had the past few weeks are nothing." Brown again firmly nodded agreement.

### **MONDAY, DECEMBER 6**

The discovery meeting resulted in no changes: no dropped charges, no public statements, no postponements. Grimm checked with the prosecutor's office and was told since the testimony was originally before the grand jury, plans are still to take the case to trial in the spring, unless a judge rules otherwise. Either the accuser will have to admit perjury before the court, or Lawler will have to face a jury.

On succeeding Saturdays, Dec. 11 and 18, Lawler would drop his p.r. push and any mention of his legal strife. However, Nashville and Jackson newspapers have weighed in with editorials calling on Lawler for a better explanation than "exaggerated girl talk" to bolster his innocence. The Jackson editorial even linked Lawler in the same breath with the woes of Michael Jackson.

WLKY eventually did tag Lawler as part of the World Wrestling Federation in followup reports---but no other media did.

### **EPILOG**

The dilemma for most journalists in any story such as this: the case is strictly centered around allegations at this point. While child abuse charges are among the most increasing in the legal system, the number of false charges raised by children and teens is also on the rise.

Most responsible writers have been quick to remind readers Lawler has only been indicted---not tried or convicted. However, the two Tennessee newspapers which have editorialized have questioned how Lawler could have been aligned with such a situation to open a two-state investigation when, as the Jackson paper put it: "he is the object of public trust, particularly among children and admiring adults." Additionally, the issue of sexual conduct of wrestlers, in general, has been anything but a well-kept secret for years.

The next significant date for Lawler: January 7. He may well walk away a free man. Regardless, the scrutiny of Jerry Lawler, who has publicly fought drug and alcohol abuse of youth in Memphis, will be far closer and sharper.

## **Pedicino Hurt In Auto Crash**

KENNESAW, Ga. - *Pro Wrestling This Week* creator Joe Pedicino is expected to make a full recovery from injuries suffered in a massive auto collision Dec. 2.

Pedicino, en route to a business meeting, was hit by an 18-wheel truck. His vehicle was spun several times and Pedicino was thrown outside his car on the passenger's side. The truck driver was charged with failing to observe a stop sign.

The 42-year-old Atlanta personality, who had been scheduled to return to WTLK two nights later with *The Joe Pedicino Saturday Night Wrestling Machine* marathon, suffered two broken ribs, two cracked ribs and internal bleeding.

Pedicino, against doctor's orders, returned to the air for his Dec. 18 show, but is still under medical restriction until mid-January.

## **Hotline Pundits Pick Top Stories**

CHICAGO----The Vince McMahon/Titan Sports steroid indictments have been selected the top wrestling story of the year for 1994 by correspondents for *The Real Wrestling Hotline*.

In a Dec. 19 live special, host Lance Russell revealed the poll, which gave the McMahon/Titan story 29 points. The suicide death of Kerry Von Erich finished second with 25 points, followed by the Sid Vicious/Arn Anderson brawl in England (24), the death of Andre the Giant (20) and a tie for fifth place between the WCW firing of Bill Watts as operations chief and the Jerry Lawler sex indictments (12).

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